

God Works in You



Thrust Statement: Man's salvation is God's creation.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (**Philippians 2:12-13**).

This passage is a puzzle to many Christians. On the one hand, Paul says, “work out your own salvation”; but, on the other hand, he says, “it is God who works in you.” Which is it? Is it both? Does man earn his salvation? Or is salvation God’s initiative? These are questions that this study seeks to unravel. Just what is Paul saying to the Philippians? In the above Scripture reading, Paul brings us face to face with the practical questions of the Christian life. In other words, he is saying that one should work out his salvation to the finish—do not give up, do not faint, do not become discouraged. This passage is not a reference to one’s attempt to earn one’s salvation by works, but rather a reference to spiritual growth and development. Salvation expresses itself in the ongoing process in which the believer is involved.

This passage (**Philippians 2:12-13**) brings us to the very heart of the most practical questions that confront each Christian in his or her walk with the Lord. But before one embarks upon a detailed study of the implications of this Scripture, it would be helpful to look at this exhortation as a whole before one analyzes its component parts. To begin with, one’s attention should focus upon the word “therefore” ({Wste) at the beginning of this verse (**12**). This word compels us to take this statement (“work

out your own salvation with fear and trembling”) within its context; the word “therefore” links this verse with the preceding verses, that is to say, what has gone before.

Paul appealed to the Philippians to live a life of holiness, to live a life of love, to live a life of forbearance, and to live a life of faithfulness to God—come what may. Paul wanted their conduct to be in harmony with the gospel of Jesus Messiah:

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you (**Philippians 1:27-28a**).

Not only does the “therefore” take us back to **1:27**, but it also takes us back to where Paul exhorts the Philippians to “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves” (**Philippians 2:3**). Paul relies upon the incarnation and resurrection of Christ to drive home his point of humility. He forcefully illustrates this:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! (**Philippians 2:5-8**).

This example of Christ’s humility furnishes a lesson for Christian unity. This deep love is the bond that binds the people of God. It is this model of unselfishness that causes God’s children to labor toward the advancement of the Lord’s kingdom on earth. Remember, Jesus expresses this kind of love to His disciples: “**A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another**” (**John 13:34-35**). It is this self-sacrificing love that induces Christians to make allowances for other believers. It is this extreme love that exhibits patience, toleration, and forgiveness.

As the Philippians work out their salvation, it is to be done without discord or pomp. This admonition is as true today as it was in Paul’s letter. As we, at the New Covenant Fellowship, work out our salvation, it is my prayer that none of us will battle with one another. Yes, Paul is encouraging these Christians toward love. He loves them and they love him. It is very possible that they are discouraged by the fact that Paul is jailed in Rome. One wonders if the Philippians were saying within themselves, “without Paul we cannot live this Christian life.”

It appears from the tone of the letter that Paul is saying, “Please don’t imagine that my presence or my freedom is essential to your living the Christian life. Through the mercy of God, I proclaimed to you the gospel. God, in His infinite wisdom, allowed me to set you on your feet and, in a sense, establish your goings. You must not feel that everything is going down the tube; you must not feel that the work in Philippi

is about to end because I am in prison and cannot come and proclaim the gospel to you.” What about us at this congregation? Do the believers here also relate to the inner feelings of the Philippians? Are you ever despondent when things do not go right with the congregation? Can you identify with the Philippians? Are you experiencing turmoil within your soul?

Who is Debbie Stroud, who is Dallas Burdette, who is Karen Taylor, who is Donnie Newton, who is Moe Taylor, who is Billy Lohr, who is Mickey Brooks, and who is Gail Tauton but servants of God. It is in this vein that Paul addresses the Corinthians:

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds (**1 Corinthians 3:5-10**).

Dallas Burdette builds upon the foundation laid by someone else; Lavone Burdette is building upon the groundwork laid by someone else. Lavone and I have one purpose; namely, to build upon the company of God’s saints; it is God who gives the increase. Paul forcefully reminds the Philippians that it is not his presence that is essential; rather, it is God’s closeness that is indispensable. For Paul, the One who is really necessary is God; the One who is important to you is with you. He wants them to understand that it is God who works in them, not Paul. Listen again to the words of Paul, “it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (**Philippians 2:13**). It is not Paul, but God that matters; it is not Buddy Bigelow, but God that matters; it is not Keith Martin, but God that matters. To the Philippians, he is saying in essence, “you must not feel that your labor in the Lord is for nothing.” This admonition is also applicable to the saints at the New Covenant Fellowship. The words of Paul to the Corinthian congregation are worth citing: “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (**1 Corinthians 15:58**).

Everyone here is a minister of God. Everyone here is a servant of God. Everyone here is a minister of the proclamation of the Good News of God. Everyone is to be actively engaged in kingdom work. Paul reminds the Corinthians as to what it is all about:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We

implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**).

God has committed to all of us this ministry of reconciliation. In the course of history, there have been times when all leaders were killed or destroyed. But since Christianity is about the love of God within the soul, it has continued. Christianity is a personal possession of every true believer. My prayer is that God will continue to work in each of you. Do you remember how Paul began his letter to the Philippians? Take note as we read about his thanksgiving and prayer:

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God (**Philippians 1:3-11**).

Salvation is a personal possession. In **Philippians 2:12-13**, Paul was not exhorting the Christians in Philippi to produce their own salvation, or to arrive at salvation, but rather to work the salvation that they already possessed through faith in Jesus. The New Testament writers never present salvation as something that individuals achieve through their own efforts, their own strivings, and their own endeavor. No! "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (**Philippians 2:13**). Not only is God the One who works in us, He is also the One who justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies. How does God justify His actions? Paul says that it is through Jesus (**Romans 3:21-31**). Once more, Paul says, "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**).

What does justification, sanctification, and glorification mean? First, when one is justified, God regards that one as guiltless; He forgives them in Christ; they are justified by faith. Justification is God clothing us with the righteousness of Jesus Messiah. Second, sanctification is that process which is going on within us; it is that which makes us more like Christ. Sanctification is continuous, whereas justification is God once and for all regarding us as sinless. Sanctification is Christ being formed within us; in other words, our nature is being purged and purified and cleansed and perfected. Sanctification is something in which you and I are active. Yes, Christians are to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (**Philippians 2:12**).

Are you aware that God is working in you? Thank God for such a doctrine that assures us that in spite of all our sins and all of our unworthiness, God is still fashioning our lives. It goes almost without saying: one who belongs to the kingdom of

God is to bring his or her life into conformity with the ethical demands of the Gospel. The new reality (new creation) in Jesus must express itself in new forms of behavior (**Romans 6:18**). Christians must ever strive to manifest the kind of behavior that belief in the Gospel promotes—newness of life (**6:4**). Is Christ manifested in your behavior? Do you treat your wife with respect? Do you treat your husband with respect? Do you treat your children with respect? Do you treat your brothers and sisters in Christ with respect? Has the Gospel made a difference in your relationship with other individuals? Is God working in you? Are you merciful? Are you kind? Are you conscious that you owe your standing before God through His act of redemption in and through His Son Jesus? Is your faith real? If so, one will see Jesus in your actions. Every Christian is called to fulfill God's will. One cannot fulfill God's will by behavior that does not glorify God.

And, finally, glorification is the state beyond this life where the believer will stand with a perfect resurrection body face to face with God. Do you fail in sanctification in your daily walk with God? Yes, we all do! But the Good News from God is this: God in His wisdom made Jesus our SANCTIFICATION. The moment one is justified, he or she is also sanctified. The moment one is sanctified, he or she is also redeemed. Have you allowed the miracle of the Cross to change your life? Are you overwhelmed with the redeeming act of God in and through Jesus? Continuous sanctification in one's life results in an elimination of narrow, bigoted, harsh, and unlovely features in your relationship with others. When one mistreats his or her spouse, one mistreats Christ; when one mistreats his or her brother or sister in Christ, one mistreats Christ (**Matthew 25:31-36**).

If you lose sight of the Cross or if you take the Cross out of your focus, you will change your way of living beyond recognition as a believer in Christ. One must always remember that he or she is a channel of God's grace in the sense that God works in you to announce the Good News of His way of salvation in Jesus (**2 Corinthians 5:17—6:1**). Do your neighbors recognize Christ in you? Do your co-workers recognize Christ in you? Do your children recognize Christ in you? Does your spouse recognize Christ in you? How do you view yourself in your relationship with God? How do you look at the Church in God's scheme of redemption? Life in Christ becomes real when one faces his or her responsibilities in proclaiming God's grace and, at the same time, putting on behavior that glorifies God. When one comes to a realization that the Church is a Christian community, that is, a fellowship of persons living together, one will see greater harmony within the congregation and superior concord within family relationships. If one loses the concept of God working in each person, one loses his or her sense of direction.

CONCLUSION

Is your life full of troubles? Do you have trouble in your marriage? Do you have trouble in the Church? Are you persecuted for your faith in Christ? If so, is this a reason to flake off and go over the hill in desertion from your walk with God (**1 Corinthians 15:58**)? How did Paul respond to troubles in the lives of the Philippian? Paul sought to encourage the Philippians in spite of persecution. To do this, he reminds them that God is working in and through them in spite of their trials and tribulations. Since God is working in them, they must ever be conscious that their kingdom work should be done with fear and trembling. Christians must never give up. God works in

all of us in order to accomplish His objectives in reaching the lost. The grace that one receives from God must bear fruit to His glory and honor. This Epistle is about restoring the lost unity between worship and work. As you reflect upon this short Epistle, you immediately realize that God demands the whole of your life. One cannot compartmentalize his or her life into both religious and secular. For the believer, all of life is worship. The Christian community is not like human organizations; it is a business, not only for Sundays, but for weekdays as well.

As you reflect upon the Church, you should always keep in mind that the Church owes its existence to an act of God. The Church is not simply a human organization, but it is a community in which Jesus Christ is the living Lord. The Church is the witness and the continuing embodiment of the historical fact that God sent His Son so that both men and women might receive the adoption of sons and daughters. The Church is an inward fellowship of faith and love. The Church is the community of those who live by faith in God's promises. The Church of Jesus Christ is built from above, not from below; it has its source in God, not man. How do you view the Church? How do you view sin? How do you perceive your relationship with God? The Church is essentially a fellowship of persons, not an institution.

Are you rebelling against the teachings of God? One must always be conscious that God's way with both men and women is to lead them to repentance. God desires to deliver everyone from sin so that everyone may serve Him in newness of life. For one to be a Christian, one must undergo a complete change in mind, from the carnal to the spiritual. Repentance and conversion are the starting points of the Christian life. Once you are converted to Christ, you should remember that the work of evangelism is not something that can be accomplished by the person in the pulpit alone. Are you proclaiming the message of God's redeeming love? The Gospel was proclaimed not only in Word, but also in deeds. The whole life of the Christian is a worship of God. The early Christians understood their life to be one continuous act of worship. Christians are to go forth, not as rulers, but as servants of the Most High God. Are you a servant of God? Are you allowing God to work in you? Again, the words of Paul to the Philippians should be memorized:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (**Philippians 2:12-13**).